CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/PV.877
14 June 2001

ENGLISH

FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND SEVENTY-SEVENTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 14 June 2001, at 10.10 a.m.

President: Mr. Camilo Reyes Rodriguez (Colombia)

GE.01-62423 (E) 200601 220601

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I declare open the 877th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament. There are no speakers on my list for today's plenary meeting, but I am informed by the secretariat that France has requested the floor. Accordingly, if the distinguished representative of France has no objection, I would request him to be so kind as to take the floor after we have first considered the following proposal.

Distinguished colleagues. I am very pleased to inform you that, at the presidential consultations held yesterday, my proposal to appoint special coordinators on the review of the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament, on the expansion of its membership and on its improved and effective functioning received unanimous support, as we have been informed by the coordinators of the groups and China.

I should now like to give official status to the agreement that has been reached and I therefore invite the Conference to take up the draft decision which is now before us in document CD/WP.518.

May I take it that it is the wish of the Conference to adopt the draft decision set out in document CD/WP.518?

It was so decided.

The decision will be issued as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

I would now like to take this opportunity to thank you for your cooperation and the spirit of accommodation displayed in our joint efforts over the past few weeks that have enabled us to adopt the decision on the appointment of three special coordinators. This decision may be seen as a rather modest achievement. I sincerely hope, however, that it will offer considerable help to us in overcoming the current stalemate and giving fresh impetus to our continuing search for an agreement on the programme of work.

The task which now faces us is to reach consensus on the persons who will fill the special coordinator posts. It is my intention to begin intensive consultations without delay through the coordinators in order to ascertain the wishes of members and groups in this regard, so that we can agree on this issue as soon as possible.

I now call upon the distinguished representative of France.

Mr. DAHAN (France) (translated from French): Mr. President, there is a French proverb that says "If a job needs doing, I'm the person for that job.". Today, at our plenary, I'm volunteering.

I have asked for the floor today to draw delegations' attention to the address given on 8 June 2001 by the President of the Republic, Mr. Jacques Chirac, to the Institute of Higher National Defence Studies, better known by its French acronym IHEDN.

(Mr. Dahan, France)

His remarks clearly set out French thinking on security policy and on arms control and disarmament. With regard to the work of our Conference, the President of the Republic said: "I shall not conceal from you my concern about the stalemate which for months now has gripped the work of the Conference on Disarmament. The negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty, which were decided upon in 1995, still have not begun and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty has not yet entered into force, pending completion of the ratification process."

The President's address may be consulted on the internet both in the original French and in an English translation. The site may be found at www.delegfrance-cd-geneve.org. Copies of the address, in French and in English, may also be obtained from the French mission.

Mr. MAIOLINI (Italy): As this is the first time that I have taken the floor under your presidency, allow me to convey the congratulations of the Italian delegation on today's decision and its sincere appreciation for your full commitment to this task.

We always inherit the legacy of our predecessors. In this case you have inherited a good and positive legacy.

We are pleased that you are not discouraged by those pessimists who have said "tout à été fait", "rien de nouveau". It would be inappropriate for us all to talk like the protagonist of Les Ambassades, who had the habit of evaluating the present as a replica of the past "lorsqu' il était jeune vice-consul à Rangoon".

The good legacy you have found comes from those who have had the imagination and the courage to propose new solutions at a time of frustration and disillusion. Those people, and we among them, dared to try to interpret the wish of a silent majority in order to assert the principle that diplomacy is dialogue. Dialogue among everybody but mainly between and among the main nuclear powers. Without dialogue the international scene is marked by tension and danger.

With today's decision we now have a lowest common denominator at which we can start our dialogue.

It is common knowledge that Italy supports the prompt beginning of a programme of work on the three outstanding issues, on the basis of the Amorim proposal. Moreover, as we suggested three months ago, we support the idea of beginning work on the four so-called "non-controversial issues" of our agenda, namely: anti-personnel landmines, nuclear security assurances, transparency in armaments, and reform of the Conference's procedures.

As I have said, a growing number of delegations have lately been showing a growing interest in this proposal, which, as we understand, still remains a possibility for the future.

Notwithstanding a more ambitious programme, Mr. President, we fully support your proposal and the decision taken by the Conference on Disarmament today. My delegation understands that your proposal is the minimum achievable and possible first step, a first block on

(Mr. Maiolini, Italy)

which to build a more substantial construction. The appointment of special coordinators on the agenda, membership and functioning of the Conference in fact represents a procedural instrument which could, in our opinion as in the opinion of the German delegation, also be used for the other "non-controversial issues". The recourse to special coordinators is not in fact a substantive measure but merely a procedural instrument useful when there is no consensus on a substantive programme.

Moreover, when we suggested beginning work on the four non-controversial issues, it was our hope and intention to see movement in several directions, so that we might achieve results in some of them at least. We might possibly have seen that, in a mutual give-and-take process, concessions by some delegations in one area could be rewarded with concessions by other delegations on another item.

Now, Mr. President, your proposal to concentrate all our efforts on only one item of our agenda - a proposal which, once again, Italy supports - leaves us much less room for manoeuvre and could make our task difficult.

Let us remain aware of that as we begin our work. At the same time, we begin our work in the full knowledge that, since we have only one arrow to shoot, we must not miss our target.

Our observers might not be impressed by our limited attempt to reform the Conference on Disarmament. They will be even less impressed, however, if we fail. This necessarily calls for a renewed effort by all delegations and for a maximum of flexibility.

With this in mind, let me assure you, Mr. President, of the full commitment of my delegation to contribute to your success. We must avoid the danger of having an empty Conference on Disarmament, of having to apply to the Conference the words of Pierre Loti on the Sphinx: "The secret of the Sphinx conceals nothing. It is like the great Pyramid, which harbours an empty tomb." With today's decision we have avoided the danger of repeating those words.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished Ambassador of Italy for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair. I now call on the distinguished representative of Germany.

Mr. ACHENBACH (Germany): Let me first congratulate you on the assumption of this important office, especially at a very critical stage in this Conference. I will not mention other very important offices in this context. I would also like to thank you for all the efforts you have undertaken that have led us to the decision that the Conference has just taken, and I would like to use this occasion also to thank all your predecessors on whose efforts you have been able to build.

The decision that the Conference has taken this year is the first decision of its kind that the Conference has been able to take for the last two and a half years. That is why we attach great importance to this decision, because it is, at least, the first step towards breaking out of the

(Mr. Achenbach, Germany)

complete stalemate of the last more than two years. It is also a first step towards re-creating some dialogue in this Conference, a dialogue that has hardly taken place lately. And it is at least an implementation of the decision taken by this Conference at the start of this year's session, namely, to resume its consultations on the reform of the agenda. So we attach greatest importance to this decision.

At the same time, Mr. President, you have yourself said that this is a very modest decision, and this is true. In fact, it is quite difficult to understand, even for an insider, why the Conference was not able to take a decision like that two years ago. So, the conclusion must be - and this is stated also, of course, in the decision we have taken - that this can only be a first step, that the Conference cannot lean back and now just wait for the special coordinators to produce results. We must of course go on trying to solve the major issues. As long as we do not succeed in solving the major issues, we must continue to work and to create a dialogue on other issues. That is why we see this decision only as a very first step in a step-by-step procedure to get this Conference back to real substantive work and to negotiations - to its original function. We believe that this first step should be followed by further steps.

A second step could be - as we have been proposing, together with Italy, for a long time - to take a decision on the other uncontroversial matters. Maybe I should better say "uncontested" items, rather than "uncontroversial", in view of certain comments which have been made in the past. I would like to underline that these items are not "uncontroversial" in substance, but at least since the presidency of the Algerian Ambassador Dembri, they have been considered by the Conference as "uncontested" elements of the future work of the Conference. In fact, if these items were uncontroversial in substance, then we would not need any special coordinators. So, we do believe that we should continue this process that you, Mr. President, have begun and, in considering further steps, the second step could be the appointment, of the two special coordinators on anti-personnel mines and transparency in armaments as well as the creation of an ad hoc committee on negative security assurances. If that should be too ambitious, one could consider the creation of such an ad hoc committee also as a third step.

The point here, however, is that we have to realize, after the experience of the last two and a half years, that we cannot solve all problems at the same time. This approach has miserably failed and we are very grateful to you, Mr. President, for leading us on a different course, on a course of step-by-step gradual achievements.

I would like to underline what has been said by the distinguished Ambassador of Italy. The appointment of special coordinators is a purely procedural step. Special coordinators are procedural instruments to help the Conference gain a clear view on a certain item, to help the Conference to get clarity on whether consensus is possible on a certain item or perhaps to realize that no consensus is possible. That can also be the outcome. The appointment of a special coordinator does not in any way prejudge the positions of delegations on substantive items. It does not constitute the beginning of negotiations. The role of the special coordinator is to find out whether consensus can be found on a certain item to start substantive negotiations.

((Mr. Achenbach, Germany)

Finally, Mr. President, I would like to conclude my few remarks in saying that we also fully support all your efforts in the future and those of your successors. We will actively support the special coordinators and, we hope, future special coordinators in their work. We will do our best to contribute ideas and substance to their work and we will support you and you and your successors in trying to solve the two outstanding major issues, as that would enable the Conference to start real work and to perform the task for which it has been created: to negotiate.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished representative of Germany for his statement and for the kind words addressed to the Chair.

Is there any other delegation which wishes to take the floor at this stage? I see none. This, therefore, concludes our work for today. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will be held on Thursday, 21 June 2001, at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.35 a.m.